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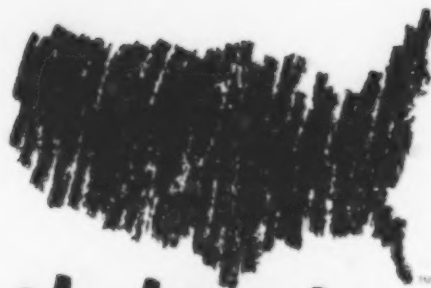
ABSTRACT

This user guide is part of a multimedia unit using an interdisciplinary approach with hands-on learning to motivate children to participate actively in their schools and local communities, and to experience the democratic process. This unit focuses on the concept of respect for self and others. Unit parts include: (1) video preview; (2) suggestions for using the unit; (3) getting ready to view the video; (4) video modeling lesson; (5) follow-up activities for primary, intermediate, and upper grade children; and (6) bibliography for children and teachers. (EH)

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For Grades K-6

ED 404 261



My America
Building a Democracy



Available in
English and
Spanish

What Is an American?

User Guide

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My America: Building a Democracy

GOALS

To help children:

- become familiar with the democratic process and active citizenship,
- recognize what it means to be a citizen in a multi-cultural society,
- build skills in communications and cooperation,
- recognize how laws are made and how a single vote and voice matter, and
- experience how caring and commitment build community.

FORMAT

MY AMERICA is a 12-unit series, consisting of:

- 15-20 minute videos
- User Guides
- Resource Directory Disks (MS-DOS & MAC)

Materials were designed by educators, for educators. An interdisciplinary approach to hands-on learning is used.

EDUCATIONAL CONTENT

The MY AMERICA kits motivate children to participate actively in their schools and local communities, and to experience the democratic process. The series attempts to demystify the government, explain how laws are made, and show how American democracy is always evolving.

MY AMERICA combines elements of traditional civics and social studies curricula with techniques and activities that encourage children to participate and become involved. **Its underlying theme is: Democracy works best when everyone participates.**

MY AMERICA teaches in the voices of children in a way that respects their intelligence and natural curiosity.

THE VIDEOS

Each tape contains on-location documentaries, animation and historical illustration. A classroom modeling lesson encourages children to use their skills in reading, writing, listening, painting, singing and performing. The cooperative learning model is central to each video.

Videos are developed within the following framework:

Kid View: Children give thought-provoking, lively opinions on each topic.

Documentary: Historical context and current concerns are blended with examples of children making a difference in their communities. This section is rich in historical information and opens up a wide range of discovery possibilities.

Modeling Lesson: Educators and students develop an interdisciplinary activity designed to bring alive the educational objective of the video.

Wrap Up: The key concept is recapped from the diverse perspectives of both children and adults.



“Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world: indeed it's the only thing that ever has.”

—Margaret Mead

PAUSE POINTS

The videotapes can be used in a variety of ways. Some educators use the tapes to teach three separate lessons on a concept. To facilitate this usage, a blackboard icon comes up between the Kid View, the Documentary and the Modeling Lesson, giving educators appropriate PAUSE POINTS during which to elaborate on concepts.

THE USER GUIDES

Guides provide multiple learning experiences, lesson plans and bibliographies built around social studies and citizenship themes. Suggested activities are interdisciplinary in approach and focus on skills in communication and cooperation.

RESOURCE DIRECTORY DISKS (MS-DOS & MAC)

MY AMERICA Resource Directory Disks include black-lined master activity sheets, samples of letters to parents and organizations, petitions, proclamations and press releases—all of which can be customized. Also included are a listing of additional resources, bibliographic references for students and teachers, historical documents, and curriculum correlations.

This icon



indicates that additional material is available on the MY AMERICA Resource Directory Disk.

What Is an American?



Educational objective:

To treat all people with respect.

Student concept:

We're all the same and we're all different. I listen to other people's ideas.

Video preview

Many people living in America come from different cultures. This video opens with children describing the diversity of Americans. We learn that people of the Iroquois Confederacy believe Native Americans were always on this continent, although anthropologists have only found proof of human life for 35,000 years. In the 1500s, after the voyages of Columbus, Europeans began arriving. But, these immigrants engaged in battles and brought diseases to Native Americans. Children learn how Africans, who came to this country against their will, became slaves with no freedom. We see waves of immigrants from around the world who came to America hoping for a better life. A class writes poems about their hopes and fears and creates body models that illustrate the American child today. In Petroglyph National Monument Park, children talk about what, like petroglyphs, helps them remember stories about their own lives.

“It doesn't matter what color we are because we are all the same in our hearts.”

—Fifth Grader
New York City

Suggestions for using “What Is an American?”

As an Opening and/or Culminating Experience to a Unit of Study: The video and suggested activities are designed to supplement existing social studies curriculum. They are highly motivating resources to introduce and engage students in understanding that diversity built the American democracy.

As an Individual Lesson: Suggested activities provide experiences to help children understand that a wide range of characteristics make up an American. Activities are divided into those appropriate for primary, intermediate and upper elementary school children.

As an Assembly Program: Have the children write four-line poems that begin with “I am an American child. I ...” Select a few children to read their descriptions of themselves. Then introduce the video *What Is an American?*





My America
Building a Democracy

What Is an American?

“I am an American kid. I hope there will be peace in our world. I pray that robots in the future will clean my room. I see a new environment ready to begin. I am an American kid.”

—Fifth Grader
New York City

Getting ready to view the video

America has been enriched and defined by immigrants. Each time our society opens to another culture, it receives new vitality. Each culture contributes its distinctiveness to every arena of American life.

- Make a list of the countries represented in the children's family histories. Have the children make a graph of responses that shows the range and number of countries and continents. Also note the years when groups of people arrived in great numbers.

- Use the graph as a reference point. Divide the children into groups and research examples of what each culture contributed to our food, fashion, art, politics, music and schools. What individuals inspired society to embrace an idea, product, sound or form? Make a pictorial timeline showing when the individual and his or her idea entered the nation's life.

- Native Americans were the first Americans. In many of their stories, the Earth is called “Turtle Island.” They believe The Great Turtle gave his shell to hold the earth after Muskrat brought it up from the sea. Sky Woman stepped on the Turtle's back and let the seeds of life fall from The Great Tree, and life on Earth began. It is said that, to this day, Muskrat's paw marks are on the back of the Turtle's shell. (See page 25 in *Keepers of the Earth*, Bibliography). Look for these marks on a turtle or in a photo of a turtle.

Key vocabulary: immigrant, anthropologist, Europe, slave, explorer, freedom, opportunity, diversity, customs

Key phrases: “wave of immigrants”, “slave ship”, Turtle Island, “a Century of Immigration”, political unrest, “a beautiful mosaic”

Video Modeling Lesson: Making an American

- ★ Creating poems and body models representing a “typical” American child starts with brainstorming what the word “American” means. Write the words on the board. A word web rich in vivid imagery emerges.

- ★ Working in small groups, the children put their words into categories like food, fashion, sports/activities, music, hopes, fears, places, fun things to do, entertainment, holidays, and the future. One person writes down the categories in each group. Encourage the children to expand the list.

- ★ Using the images and feelings the words describe, the children write poems about their hopes and fears and create models of a “typical” American.

- ★ Children design the models by tracing their bodies on brown paper. Plan how to illustrate the words that characterize the American child. Plan the outfits with colored paper.

- ★ At their tables, the children read their poems and present the Americans they created from words, pictures and three-dimensional models.

Modeling Lesson Materials: chart paper, magic markers, dictionaries, yarn, felt, glue, tape, pipe cleaners, wool, construction paper, cotton and pencils

Modeling Teacher: Judi Berger, PS 124, New York City

“I am an American kid. I hope the hole in the ozone layer clogs up. I touch the leaves of a tree wondering about the future environment. I feel alive when I see an endangered animal being born. I am an American kid.”

—Fifth Grader
PS 124
New York City

What Is an American?



My America

Building a Democracy

Follow-up activities for primary grade children

- ★ To Native Americans corn was known as First Food and played a central role in all meals. Native Americans cultivated over 300 varieties with white, yellow, red and blue kernels. Ask the children how many varieties they have eaten. Have them illustrate how other varieties might have looked. Have them imagine their taste. Bring in cornmeal. Have the children feel it. Ask them to identify other foods made from corn products. Make corn muffins together. See the MY AMERICA  activity sheet for a recipe.
- ★ Use the graph generated in the activity on page 3. Discuss an international food festival. The class's collective ethnic heritage should produce a wide range of special dishes for the festival. Once the children select a dish from each culture, they write a letter to parents about working together to create the dish. See the MY AMERICA  for a sample letter. If the class is not widely diverse ethnically, ask the children to pick a favorite ethnic food.
- ★ All ethnic groups have made huge contributions to American education, law, government, history, business, sports and entertainment. Read the stories of famous African-Americans to the children. Then continue with stories about other people from diverse backgrounds who have enriched America. See the MY AMERICA Bibliography and the MY AMERICA .

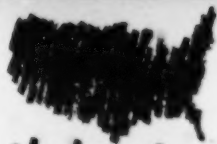
Follow-up activities for intermediate grade children

- ★ The Anasazi and Sinagua Indians of the Southwest were two groups of original American people. They no longer exist. They lived in red rock canyons and carved and inscribed drawings, called petroglyphs, on the walls. The petroglyphs remind us of the lives of these First Americans. Everyone's family has certain momentos and traditions that keep alive stories and the spirit of people who lived before us. The children bring in something from home that helps them remember a special story of their family's life. How are these items like petroglyphs?
- ★ Who are the explorers of today and the next century? Are they astronauts, oceanographers, peacemakers? Brainstorm words that describe the personalities and character of 21st century explorers. Use the adjectives to write odes to these men and women as they depart on an adventure. Create three-dimensional body models of what they wear. Who in the class would like to be a 21st century explorer of a new world? Why? How would you be different from the explorers in the past? Will you be tender and generous? Send the children's work and responses to the MY AMERICA  Newsletter for publication.

“I am an American kid. I wonder if all countries in the world will be free and democratic like America. I fear AIDS and other diseases. I pray that everyone can get a well-paying and safe job. I am an American kid.”

—Fifth Grader
New York City





My America
Building a Democracy

What Is an American?

Did You Know That?

- The term "OKAY" is derived from the Choctaw word "okey" which means "yes, it is."

—Source: The Native American History Quiz Book

- In the schools of Chicago; Fairfax County, VA; New York and Los Angeles more than 100 languages are spoken by the students.

—Source: Newcomers in American Schools, Rand

- Since 1901, 30 percent of America's Nobel Prize Winners have been immigrants.

—Source: Time Magazine, Special Issue, Fall, 1993.

Follow-up activities for upper grade children

★ We often hear of extinct animals. We do not often learn about nations of Native Americans, like the Sinagua and the Anasazi, who no longer exist. Research these and other Native American people who made contributions to our country. Brainstorm ways to permanently document and celebrate their lives, language, land and culture. Do the children live in a state these people once called home? If so, what exists where the groups once lived? Create a map that illustrates where now-extinct groups of Native Americans settled.

★ Form a committee to design and build a monument to Native Americans. See the MY AMERICA *Liberty and Justice* kit for resource information on symbols and monuments. If the children prefer a living monument, suggest they research the 300 varieties of corn the Native Americans once grew. How many varieties exist today? What must they know to grow that original corn? Generate a list of questions and sources of information. Divide the children into groups

to research answers. Plant a corn field or garden of original varieties as a living, nourishing monument to Native Americans.

★ The top 10 languages spoken in America today are English, Spanish, French, German, Italian, Chinese, Tagalog, Polish, Korean and Vietnamese. Brainstorm who can translate the Pledge of Allegiance into these languages. To get started, check the MY AMERICA *A Pledge Is a Promise* User Guide for the words of the pledge in Spanish.



The MY AMERICA Newsletter publishes active citizen-

ship projects and activities. Send your photos, stories, and videotapes to:

MY AMERICA
Newsletter
c/o New Castle
Communications
229 King Street
Chappaqua, NY 10514

Find It In The MY AMERICA

- Emma Lazarus' poem "The New Colossus" is inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty. It begins with: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free..."

What Is an American?



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Check the
MY AMERICA 
for additional
books, resources
and activity sheets
to extend the con-
cepts of *What Is an
American?*

My America
Building a Democracy



**MY AMERICA:
LEARNING ABOUT
DEMOCRACY**
*USER GUIDES and
DIRECTORY DISK*

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MY AMERICA consists of the following program titles:

What Is a Flag?

A Pledge Is a Promise

Neighborhood and Community

Liberty and Justice

What Is an American?

The Story of the National Anthem

What Is a Democracy?

How Our Laws Are Made

Becoming an Active Citizen

Rights and Responsibilities

Teaching in a Multicultural Society (For Teachers)

Parents, Teachers and Community: Working Together (For Parents)

Resources available, AT NO CHARGE, when you purchase the entire multimedia series:

MY AMERICA Newsletter: published three times during the school year.

MY AMERICA Teacher Training Video: 10 classroom activities around civic issues.



**“In our every deliberation, we must
consider the impact of our decisions
on the next seven generations.”**

—The Great Law of the Six Nations
Iroquois Confederacy

About New Castle Communications, Inc.

MY AMERICA is published by New Castle Communications, Inc. The company is creating educational materials in video, print and computer software formats. New Castle Communications is committed to designing, producing and distributing multimedia materials that engage children and inspire them to get involved in their classrooms, schools and communities.



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